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on it in 1878. But Dunckley was concerned only with the instances of Queen Victoria's interference with the cabinet that were revealed in the earlier volumes of Martin's *Life of the Prince Consort*. Mr. Farrer's book, as has been indicated, is much more comprehensive; and the material embodied in it is of particular value to those students of the history of cabinet government in England who have not had opportunities for following the relations of the cabinet and the crown, and of the cabinet and Parliament, in what may not inappropriately be called the primary sources.

To discuss Mr. Farrer's conclusions would call for half a dozen pages of the *American Historical Review*. Even in this brief note, however, attention must be directed to one of them.

The course of events [he writes] whilst reducing the appearance of monarchical power, has tended to its increase in reality; for although the actual veto has passed into disuse, the veto precedent has become a more serious barrier against any legislation distasteful to the crown. Mr. Lecky's statement that "the English sovereignty is so restricted in its province that it has, or ought to have, no real influence on legislation" is hardly borne out by the influence exercised over legislation by George III., George IV., William IV., and Queen Victoria.

George III. wrought successfully to make a failure of Pitt's bill of 1785 for the reform of the representative system. George III. and George IV. delayed Catholic emancipation for at least one generation; and enormous pressure was necessary before William IV. would accept Grey's terms in regard to the Reform Act of 1832. But the history of popular political agitations in England from 1832 to the end of the nineteenth century, when compared with the additions to the statute book during those sixty-eight years, would not seem to warrant Mr. Farrer's conclusions in regard to what he describes as the "veto precedent"—the sanction of the crown before the cabinet can introduce an important bill to Parliament. The writer of this note, while thoroughly appreciating the usefulness of Mr. Farrer's contribution to the history of the cabinet, could not subscribe to this sweeping conclusion of the author. It is not possible to accept it in view of the numerous movements for reform from Waterloo to the death of Queen Victoria which were attended with legislative success.

*Life of John Wilkes.* By HORACE BLEACKLEY. (London and New York: John Lane Company. 1917. Pp. xiii, 464. \$5.00.)

*Wilkes and the City.* By WILLIAM PURDIE TRELOAR. (London: John Murray. 1917. Pp. xxvi, 299. 12 sh.)

THE career of John Wilkes was not well calculated to win him a place in the *Twelve English Statesmen Series*. At first cautiously tolerated by respectable Whigs, he finally won recognition by the party, only to prove a renegade in the end by going over to the Tories. The Whigs could not laud a man who had deserted them, or the Tories one

who joined them after using up all his ammunition in the service of their enemies. For nearly a century, therefore, no one had a good word to say for John Wilkes; and even as late as 1874, John Richard Green, a Liberal and likely to be generous in his appreciations, passed him by with a reference to the scurrility of his writings and the licentiousness of his morals. In time, of course, rehabilitation was bound to come. Begun by Charles W. Dilke, and continued by Sir George Trevelyan and Percy Fitzgerald, it is now fairly completed by Mr. Bleackley and Mr. Treloar.

Of the two works, that of Mr. Bleackley is the more scholarly. Mr. Bleackley has carefully examined the Wilkes papers and other manuscript material in the British Museum, as well as all the printed sources. Other books will doubtless be written about the *Friend of Liberty*, but one can hardly suppose it will ever again be worth while to set down in clear and sober prose a detailed narrative of the events of his life. It is well known that every one makes mistakes (Mr. Freeman has said so), but it seems unlikely that Mr. Bleackley has made very many; and where he differs from Mr. Treloar in any matter, as for example whether, on a certain occasion, the marshal and the tipstiffs were dragged from their seats in the carriage before or after the arrival at the Three Tuns Tavern—on any such point of difference the chances are that Mr. Bleackley is right. Mr. Treloar indeed makes no pretensions to the character of a trained historian, nor does he claim to have written an account of the events of Wilkes's career. His interest in the subject dates from 1881, when he was chosen a member of the London Corporation from the ward which elected Wilkes—Farringdon Without; and since then he has read, out of pure interest, whatever came his way about his famous predecessor, and about the City of that day. In this way he has become familiar with a great many documents; from which, without making such an analysis of them as authorities on historical method recommend, he has extracted what seem to him the most interesting parts; and these he has arranged in proper order, himself furnishing little more than the connecting commentary necessary to make the story intelligible. The reader will therefore go to Mr. Bleackley for a detailed statement of the facts of Wilkes's life; and to Mr. Treloar for many interesting and more or less relevant documents.

From neither writer will the reader get much that is striking or original in the way of an interpretation of the man and his times. In Mr. Bleackley's book one meets of course all the familiar people; but while the author knows a great deal about them, he seems not to visualize them very effectively, or at least fails to make the reader do so, having apparently neither taste nor talent for analysis of character or convincing portraiture of personalities. At times, in the course of the long level journey, one wishes the precise guide had a touch of Carlyle's magic power of making the dead rise and speak—not that it is right to

expect a guide to be a genius. Consistency, however, one may expect above all from a guide; yet it is difficult to make out precisely what Mr. Bleackley thinks of the reign of George III. and of Wilkes's part in it. The achievements of Wilkes are regarded as "stupendous"—it was his "proud privilege . . . to preserve one of the most essential principles of English liberty"; but still George III. is not to be condemned for departing from "the principles of the Revolution" because such a condemnation "involves the proposition that the growth of the nation . . . has been directed . . . more wisely by a legislative assembly elected more or less under popular suffrage than it could have been under any other form of government, a proposition that will find an emphatic contradiction in the history of Japan or modern Germany". Therefore "we cannot tell to what extent the nation might have profited under the rule of a benevolent autocrat, assisted by the wisest ministers . . . untrammelled by the vicissitudes of party strife". This last is true; but if George III.'s German system was as likely to confer benefits as that of the Whigs, it is difficult to see where Wilkes comes in as the proud defender of "one of the most essential principles of English liberty".

Perhaps Mr. Bleackley means only that there are different kinds of liberty, equally good, and that Wilkes was indispensable to the preservation of the kind which is English. However defined, it is still possible to doubt that liberty owes so much to Wilkes. It does not appear clearly so from this careful narrative of his career; and it is not until the last chapter, in which Mr. Bleackley sketches the verdict of posterity and attempts to make an estimate of the real importance of Wilkes, that one becomes aware of his greatness. Mr. Bleackley does not place Wilkes among the "immortals"; but he was "undoubtedly a man of genius", as much "in earnest as any man who ever fought for freedom", a man who "probably . . . influenced more powerfully the Spirit of the Age" than any of his contemporaries. In so far as he failed, he did so principally because he was a generation ahead of his times. To be sure he had his defects—"to morality, of course, he made no pretence"; but he had his excellent qualities also—he never harbored malice toward his enemies, was generous and good-natured, loyal to his friends, and passionately and genuinely attached to his daughter.

It is very true that Wilkes was good-natured and generous, harboring no malice although creating much, kind to his daughter and loyal to his friends. He was, for example, extremely fond of Churchill. But these virtues were the least one could expect from a sad dog like Wilkes, an absolutely irresponsible person for whom life was an adventure and politics a game for high stakes. He played the game and won it; against great odds he won it by virtue of his exceptional talents—by virtue of his cleverness and wit, his reckless daring, his good nature, the generous expenditure of what was his and of what was not his, and a certain sustained brazen effrontery raised to the point of sublimity;

and he won it because the times were such as to give an opening to these peculiar talents. In playing the game of politics, Wilkes put on the dress of liberal ideas; and by winning the game he contributed something, even a good deal, to make the dress fashionable; but it is too much to say that without his example the dress would not have become the settled custom.

No doubt the man was sincere, in one sense—in the sense that Stephen A. Douglas was sincere in not caring whether slavery was voted up or down. It is difficult for a man who does not care, to be insincere. Wilkes did not care. If Wilkes had really cared about liberty it would indeed be “remarkable that one who could write so well has left little that survives”. Perhaps the truth is that he left little—nothing in fact—that survives, because he had nothing to say when he wrote well. He wrote well when it was a question of lampooning some one outrageously; whether the facts supported the lampoon or not, it had to be done outrageously or it was not done well. In behalf of liberty, Wilkes could write an excellent attack on the Earl of Sandwich or upon the king; but about liberty itself he could write nothing but puerile and stilted commonplace. It is for this reason that one may doubt whether, fifty years later, Wilkes’s “liberal ideas must have given him an important place in the government of his country”. Liberal ideas, or any ideas, unsupported by conviction or character, ideas merely caught on the run and pressed into desperate service, are not likely to give a man an important place in the government of his country. Besides, it would seem, from all accounts, that there was an excellent opportunity, during the years from 1774 to 1790, for a member of Parliament with liberal ideas, or any ideas, to play a considerable part. Wilkes was in Parliament during those years; but, although he vociferated as loudly as ever (until he joined the Tories) that the “voice of the people is the voice of God”, Mr. Bleackley admits that his followers were disappointed in the hope that “he would prove as puissant in the Senate as he had been in the market-place”.

Wilkes’s place was indeed in the market-place. A born agitator, he was an irresponsible adventurer in politics whose services to the cause of liberty were slight in proportion to the noise he made and the rancors he created; and Mr. Bleackley’s excellent narrative of the facts of Wilkes’s career serves to confirm rather than to disprove this opinion. The judgment of Horace Walpole, which Mr. Treloar quotes, if a little caustic is still essentially just: “Wantonness rather than ambition or vengeance guided his hand, and though he became a martyr to the best cause there was nothing in his principles or his morals that led him to care under what government he lived. To laugh and riot and scatter firebrands with him was liberty. Despotism will ever reproach Freedom with the profligacy of such a saint.”

CARL BECKER.